

“Every person of Chinese origin or descent...”: Anti-Chinese Immigration Laws in Canada, 1885-1967

Grade Level: 9-12 and Secondary III-V (Quebec)

Lesson Length: 75 minutes

Curriculum Links:

- History (Canada, 20th century, immigration history)
- Law (Immigration law, legal history)
- Social Studies (Civics, governance)

Lesson Topics:

- Immigration policy and laws
- Chinese Canadian history
- Discrimination

Lesson Goals: By the end of the lesson, students will be able to...

- Understand the evolution of Canadian immigration policies over the period 1885-1967
- Read and understand historical legislation
- Apply their knowledge of historical legislation to individual cases
- Draw the link between historical immigration policies and contemporary immigration policies

Equipment:

- Handout, “Anti-Chinese Immigration Laws in Canada, 1885-1967” ([link](#))
- Worksheet, “Anti-Chinese Immigration Laws in Canada - Scenarios” ([link](#))
- (Optional) Audio clips from the Exhibits “I thought I was Canadian but they didn’t recognize me as Canadian’: Legislation and its Impact” and “The sense of where you come from’: Timeline of Chinese Canadian History” on the website *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967* (www.mhso.ca/chinesecanadianwomen)
- (Optional) Computer or audio equipment to play selected clips

Advanced Preparation:

1. Explore the website *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967* (www.mhso.ca/chinesecanadianwomen) and in particular the Exhibits “I thought I was Canadian but they didn’t recognize me as Canadian’: Legislation and its Impact” and “The sense of where you come from’: Timeline of Chinese Canadian History”
2. Photocopy the Handout and Worksheets (1 of each document per student – note that the Handout can be distributed in full to each student – 6 pages total – or give students only the portion of the Handout that relates to their time period.)
3. (If access to computer or audio equipment in class) Select audio clips for use in class from the Exhibits “I thought I was Canadian but they didn’t recognize me as Canadian’: Legislation and its Impact” and “The sense of where you come from’: Timeline of Chinese Canadian History” and/or the Collection Database.

Suggested clips:

- Judi Michelle Young, "Chinese Head Tax (1885)" from Exhibit "'The sense of where you come from': Timeline of Chinese Canadian History"
 - Raymond Lum, "Paper Daughters" from Exhibit "'I thought I was Canadian but they didn't recognize me as Canadian': Legislation and its Impact"
 - Various, "Family Separation" subject keyword from Collections
4. (Optional) Instruct students to explore the Exhibits "'I thought I was Canadian but they didn't recognize me as Canadian': Legislation and its Impact" and "'The sense of where you come from': Timeline of Chinese Canadian History" from the website *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967* (www.mhso.ca/chinesecanadianwomen) prior to class.

Lesson Plan:

1. Introduction to Lesson (10 minutes)

- As a class, discuss immigration policy as a way that countries control their populations.
- Brainstorm different characteristics that countries may want in their immigrants, and characteristics that they may not want
 - Examples of possible desirable characteristics: work skills, wealth, education, family support, perceived ease integrating
 - Examples of possible undesirable characteristics: criminal record, health problems, perceived difficulty integrating
- Use the following quote from Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's speech "Canada's Postwar Immigration Policy" (May 1, 1947) as an entry point into Canada's historic treatment of Chinese immigrants:

"With regard to the selection of immigrants, much has been said about discrimination. I wish to make it quite clear that Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens. It is not a "fundamental human right" of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege. It is a matter of domestic policy. Immigration is subject to the control of the parliament of Canada... There will, I am sure, be general agreement with the view that the people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population. Large-scale immigration from the orient would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population."

2. Introduction to Canadian immigration policy and impact on individuals (15 minutes)

- Using information from the website *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967* and other resources, explain Canada's history of anti-Chinese immigration policies. If you are incorporating oral history audio clips, suggested points of relevance are indicated.
 - **1885-1923**: Imposition of a head tax on Chinese labourers. The tax started at \$50, and was raised to \$100 and then \$500.
 - Audio clip: Judi Michelle Young
 - **1923-1947**: "Exclusion Period" wherein strict legal restrictions effectively stopped Chinese immigration. This led to years of family separation, with husbands in Canada and wives and children in China. It also led to illegal immigration as paper sons and daughters.
 - Audio clip: Various ("Family separation" subject keyword)
 - Audio clip: Raymond Lum

- **1947-1967**: Restricted sponsorship of family members on the same terms as other Asian immigration – still more heavily restricted than European immigration.
 - Audio clip: Various (“Family separation” subject keyword)
- **1967**: Canada adopts the “points system” of immigration, and race is officially no longer treated as a valid consideration when determining an immigrant’s admissibility to Canada.

3. Working with historical legislation (40 minutes)

- Distribute handout and worksheet.
- Assign students to group 1 (1885-1923), group 2 (1923-1947), group 3 (1923-1947) or group 4 (1947-1967). Note that groups 2 and 3 are the most challenging, and group 4 is the least challenging.
- Instruct students to read the section of the Handout that relates to their time period individually. When they have finished, they should choose a partner from the same group, read over the assigned Worksheet scenario and determine a course of action.

4. Wrap-Up (10 minutes)

- Ask a volunteer from each of the four groups to share their scenario and course of action and reasoning with the class. Ask if other pairs assigned to that scenario came to the same decision or not, and if not, ask them to share their decision and reasoning.
- Ask the class to reflect on what they found just or unjust, and what they found surprising or unsurprising.